



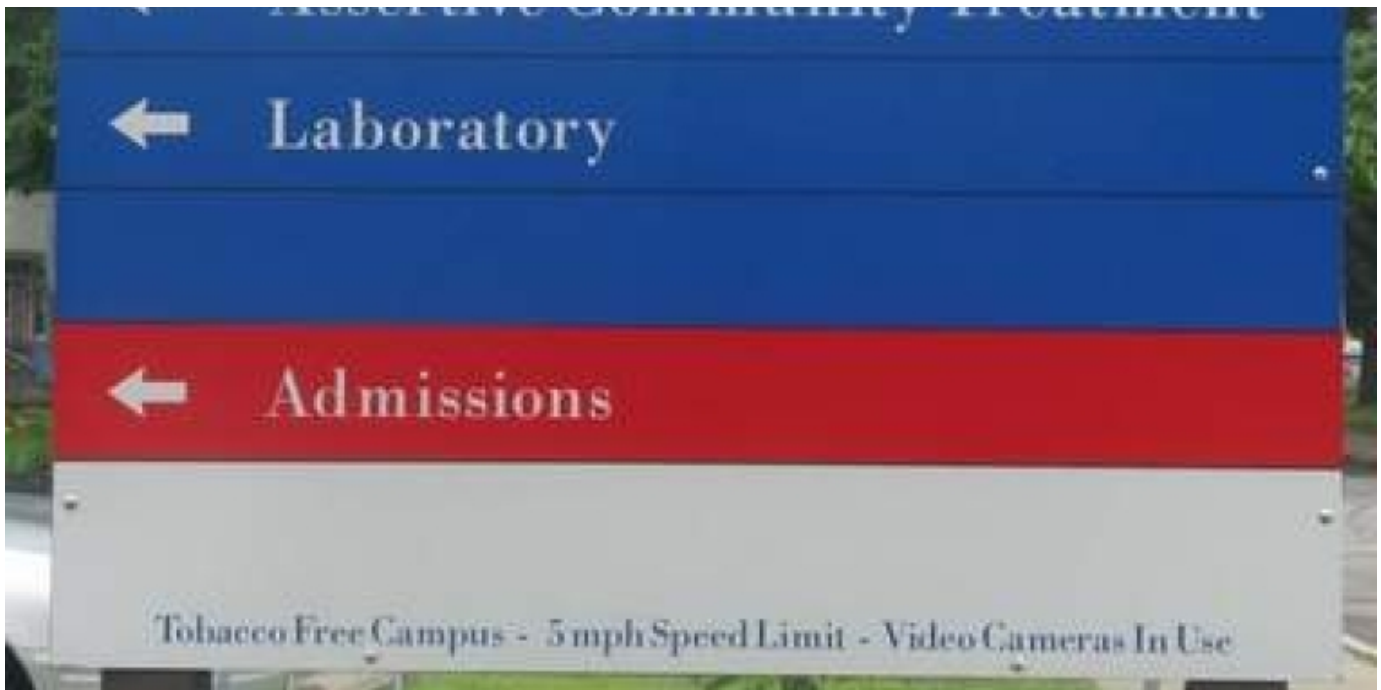
NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara, colleagues hold hearing on future of Elmira Psychiatric Center (Updated)

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 28, 2013

| ISSUE: **MENTAL HEALTH**



[UPDATED, October 30: [Watch a replay of the October 28th hearing](#)]

[UPDATED, October 29: [Watch a report on yesterday's hearing on WETM-TV](#)]

Elmira, N.Y., October 28—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats) today hosted a public hearing in Elmira on the futures of the Elmira Psychiatric Center (Elmira PC) and the Greater Binghamton Health Center, and the need for an ongoing “Southern Tier-based Center of Excellence” within New York State’s system of mental health.

"I'm hopeful that today's hearing continues to make it clear to Governor Cuomo and his administration that the Southern Tier is being ignored in this plan at great risk to regional mental health patients and their families. The Southern Tier needs and deserves a stronger presence than what's being proposed by the current Office of Mental Health reorganization plan," said O'Mara. "We're going to keep making the undeniable case, fiscally and from a public service standpoint, that the Elmira Psychiatric Center has long been and should remain a cornerstone of this state's mental health system."

[Read more in the October 29th *Star-Gazette*, "[Making a case for the Elmira Psych Center](#)"]

[O'Mara was joined at today's hearing](#) by the chairman of the State Senate Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Senator David Carlucci (D-Rockland County), and Binghamton-area Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (D-Endwell). The hearing was held in the Chemung County Legislative Chambers at the John H. Hazlett Building in Elmira.

O'Mara and his legislative colleagues heard testimony from local government leaders and officials, Elmira PC officials, current and former Elmira PC patients and family members, regional law enforcement, representatives of Elmira PC employees, and local and statewide mental health advocates.

[See attached testimony list below]

Today's hearing is one of several public forums being held by the Senate after the announcement in early July from the state Office of Mental Health (OMH) of a comprehensive, statewide reorganization plan that will shut down inpatient services at the Elmira PC and psychiatric hospitals in eight other communities throughout New York, mostly upstate and including Binghamton. The hospitals will be closed and existing services consolidated within 15 "regional centers of excellence" OMH plans to open across the state.

Under the plan, Elmira PC, Buffalo PC and Western New York Children's PC will be merged into one regional center known as the Great Lakes RCE that will be located in Buffalo. The plans calls for no inpatient services to remain at Elmira, but the center will continue as a "community hub" of the Great Lakes RCE and provide highly specialized community services.

[O'Mara and other local leaders have been critical of the OMH plan](#) for failing to recognize the central role that the Elmira PC has played in the delivery of an inpatient and outpatient network of mental health services over an 11-county region across the Southern Tier, Finger Lakes and western New York. They continue to stress that the Elmira PC has been one of New York's most cost effective, efficient, innovative and high quality mental health providers for decades and that the Cuomo administration plan fails to fully recognize the

challenges of providing these services in the rural communities and regions where the Elmira PC has been successful.

The OMH plan would, as well, force area patients and their families to travel to Buffalo, Rochester or Utica for inpatient care. O'Mara said that risks unacceptable hardships for patients and families who would have to travel great distances and, in fact, may make some of them reluctant to seek out the care and treatment they need.

Supporters of the Elmira PC also note that the Cuomo administration plan puts at risk hundreds of important local jobs.

Shortly after the OMH announcement this summer, O'Mara launched an online "Join The Fight!" petition drive to rally public support for the Elmira Psychiatric Center (Elmira PC) – which has gained more than 3,000 supporters.

"Word keeps spreading that the effort's underway to try to convince the Cuomo administration to reconsider the future of the Elmira PC and to protect the place we believe it's earned as a flagship of New York's mental health system," said O'Mara. "We need to keep building support."

To sign O'Mara's "Join The Fight!" online petition, [CLICK HERE](#).